

In or Out

John 8:21-36

It did not take long for Jesus to make enemies. Obviously it was no fault of his and entirely their fault – but early in Jesus’ ministry most of the Jewish religious leaders identified Jesus as a threat and started making plans to get rid of him.

“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” John 5:18

Notice they weren’t seeking to rebuke him or seeking to silence him – they were seeking to KILL him. They knew that Jesus’ claims did not leave any middle ground. ***People were either going to side with Jesus or side with them.*** Look at the end of John chapter 7:

“Some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee?’ ... So there was ***a division among the people.***” John 8:40,43

This is what Jesus does. ***He forces a decision.*** You cannot hear about Jesus and remain undecided. You will either commit to Him in faith or you will reject Him. Jesus does not allow for any fence sitting – you are either for him or against him. He taught this explicitly, that he did not come to bring peace but a sword – to divide families. That may not sound like the Hallmark Jesus – the airbrushed, always smiling, “It’s all good,” Jesus invented by modern America. This is the REAL JESUS. The Biblical Jesus.

You can’t read the gospel accounts and miss **the theme of CONFLICT**. It runs through all four gospels from beginning to end. Keep in mind, Jesus’ story ends at a cross – and he is put there by the Jewish people who should have embraced him as their Messiah, which he was. The crowds were beginning to realize this and the Jewish leaders knew it would change everything to admit he was the Messiah. So they did the only other thing they could do – they set out to have him killed. And eventually they succeeded.

John 8 shows us this conflict beginning to boil. And Jesus did not shy away from it – he dove right in. Look at verse 12.

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” John 8:12

Light and dark. Truth and lies. These are the terms of John 8. God and the devil. There are only two sides and they are not hard to distinguish. It is as clear as light and dark. If you follow Jesus, you will walk in the light. If you don't follow Jesus, you will walk in darkness. It's as simple as that.

Jesus invites everyone to come to him and be saved. **But you have to come to him to be saved.** If you have not bowed to King Jesus, pledging yourself in service to Him, then you remain His ENEMY, for you are dead in your sin, defined by your sin and destined to be judged by Him for your sin. ***If you are not committed to serving Jesus then you are living in service to the devil.*** Look at the end of this passage in verse 42.

“If God were your Father, you would love me... You belong to your father, the devil... Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” John 8:42,44,47

This may sound extreme to our modern ears, but **Jesus says it very clearly.** If you are not devoted to Him then your father is the devil. If you don't hear Jesus' voice and follow him as Lord then don't pretend that God is your Father because he isn't. The devil is.

I wouldn't dare speak in such stark terms except that Jesus does. It is not for me to adjust or explain away the Word of God, it is for me to PREACH it. So here we go. Our lesson today is **IN OR OUT.** That's it. ***You either belong to Jesus or you don't.*** And Jesus makes it clear how you can tell. “Whoever belongs to God hears what God says.” That's it. That's the test. If you don't know the voice of God, the reason is that you do not belong to Him.

Now, I'm not saying you should hear God's audible voice. That might indicate a serious medical problem. The main thing this means is that you **recognize Jesus as the full and final word of God.** Because that's the crux of the matter – either Jesus is the Son of God as he claimed or he isn't. You can't claim to believe in Jesus as a good moral teacher while denying that He was God in the flesh. You can't celebrate Jesus as the great Rabbi of love while denying his central teaching – that He was and is the light of the world, the creator of the world and the Lord of all things.

Today we'll see three SIGNS of a true child of God.

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

- **D - Deceived**

Jesus is the light. When you come to Him in faith you step into the light. But before that, you were walking in darkness – the darkness of unbelief, rebellion and deception. All of us were in this position. No one starts from a position of enlightenment. We all start out deceived.

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!” John 8:45

- **D - Deceived**

This is *the default position* of the human heart – deceived and resistant to the truth. The Jewish leaders knew deep down that Jesus was telling the truth – but they SUPPRESSED that truth, they pressed it down. And we all did this at one point.

Romans 1 says this is *the universal condition of all people* – we “suppress the truth by our unrighteousness.” One pastor says it’s like holding a beach ball underwater. To resist the truth is not easy – to deny that God exists and that you’ll give an account to Him one day goes against what we know in our conscience. But people work hard to hold down that beach ball of truth. That’s what the religious leaders were doing with Jesus – and we all did it. But we were not just deceived by our sin – we were enslaved to it.

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” John 8:23

- **E - Enslaved**

All of us naturally turn away from God in pursuit of our own sinful desires. We are all like the five year old who is honest enough to say, “I do what I want because I love my own self.” **We are OF THIS WORLD.** Naturally, by birth, we belong to this world. But we are sinners not just by nature – we are also sinners by choice. Verse 34:

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” John 8:34

- **E - Enslaved**

All sin is addictive. And like all addictions, the first trick a sin pulls off is convincing you it doesn’t exist. So we all live our lives in DENIAL. But the person outside of Christ does not just struggle with sin – they are ENSLAVED to sin. Sin is the controlling power in their life. And that’s how it was for you and for me. Sin USED TO BE your master just as it used to be my master.

Can you remember those days, when you were deceived by sin and enslaved to it? **Scott Lothery** was my boss in Chicago – the Executive Pastor of the Orchard. He actually attended here at Oakwood when he was younger, on staff with athletes in action, playing baseball and telling people about Jesus. But Scott was not raised in the church. His later teen years and first half of his college life were not devoted to Jesus. Scott said he unashamedly lived for himself and did whatever he felt like doing. And he didn't even feel guilty about it. Drugs, alcohol, women... Scott lived the party life and felt totally like he was doing the right thing – the only thing.

But then he heard the gospel – he heard about Jesus and suddenly realized there was a Judge to whom he would answer one day. And he said everything changed. The sin he had previously enjoyed without any guilt or worry suddenly felt different. It came with fear and guilt and shame. He said, ***“Jesus ruined sin for me!”*** So he surrendered his life to Jesus and became a gospel preacher.

Can you remember when Jesus ruined sin for you? You had been deceived and enslaved but then Jesus opened your eyes and broke those shackles from your wrists?

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“You are doing the works of your own father... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires.” John 8:41,44

- **A – Antagonistic to God**

The Jewish leaders thought they were serving God, but **in fact they were enemies of God**. That's how deceived they were by their pride and self-centeredness. They wanted to claim God as their Father and to believe they were serving God – but in fact they were serving the devil who was their true father.

This is true of so many people today. They go to church, pay their taxes, sing about Jesus, say a few prayers, give to charity, maybe even serve once in a while in a food pantry or something. But in their hearts they are not committed to Jesus, ***they are not really devoted to Him***.

Don't miss this warning – for you or your loved ones. It is entirely possible to THINK you are serving God and actually be serving the devil. Jesus said that MANY people would say to Him, “Lord, Lord, didn't I do all these things for you,” and He will say, ***“Depart from me, I never knew you.”*** That is the scariest verse in the Bible. It means LOTS OF PEOPLE think they are right with God and they are not. They think they are serving Jesus but actually don't know Him at all.

So let's be clear – let's be direct on this. We all used to be antagonistic – opposed to God. We used to be His enemies. Only through Jesus can you be reconciled to God and adopted as His beloved child.

Do you know how far from God you used to be? Deceived by sin. Enslaved by sin. Antagonistic to God and His kingdom. And Doomed – deserving eternal suffering.

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.” John 8:24

- **D - Doomed**

Think about that phrase – “die in your sins.” **IN them**. Apart from Jesus’ saving work, all people are IN SIN. That is their condition. Sin runs in their veins. They are deceived by it so they aren’t aware of the poison of sin that is killing them. They are enslaved to sin – it’s the only master they have ever known. And they are doomed to live in this condition FOREVER.

Because Jesus is the only one who can rescue you from being DEAD in your sin.

You know you are a child of God if:

1. You know how far from Him you used to be

“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.” John 8:24

- **Deceived - Enslaved - Antagonistic - Doomed**

This is what we all deserve – to die in our sin – to be forever defined and controlled by our own selfishness and evil desires.

Sin is like **a deadly disease**. One of our elders, Rob, has been battling a ***flesh eating bacteria***. We aren’t sure how he got this nasty bacteria inside of him – but once it was there it did everything it could to kill him. And that is precisely what sin does – it consumes us from the inside. Thankfully with a lot of prayer and excellent medical care, Rob is doing better and should come home soon. He has a long recovery ahead of him – but the flesh eating bacteria has been removed.

What a picture of the gospel! Surgeons had to open up most of Rob’s leg to slice out these flesh-eating gremlins. But after the third surgery doing this, they saw that they got the “headquarters” of these evil critters and were confident the main battle had been won.

That is what Jesus does for us! There are still some remaining pockets of infection, and the Holy Spirit helps us deal with those. **But the headquarters of the sin virus is what Jesus comes in to KILL**. He doesn’t coddle it – he kills it. And that is the only way to escape the death sentence that comes with sin.

Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. And apart from Jesus, you will DIE IN YOUR SIN. It will consume you forever. Do you know how far from God you used to be? Can you remember when sin controlled you? Can you appreciate all that Jesus saved you from? That is the first sign that you truly do belong to the Lord. Here is the second one:

You know you are a child of God if:

2. You have made a clear commitment to Christ

“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.” John 8:24

- **You Turned from your sin**

To believe in Jesus is a two step process. Both happen at the same time, but both are necessary. The first step is called **REPENTANCE**, which means to turn around. It means you were going one way and made a 180 to go the other way. All of us were going the way of sin – following our proud, selfish desires. And that self-focused direction was leading us straight to hell. To follow Jesus, you must first turn from your old path, your old life.

And when you take this step, you know it. It starts with conviction. You feel a strong sense of guilt about the choices you were making. You know that what you are doing is wrong. You feel it. That is the first thing the Holy Spirit does when He is drawing someone to Jesus – ***He convicts the world of GUILT.***

I can remember ***those first feelings of conviction*** like they were yesterday. I was 12 years old. The thing about middle school boys is that there is so much you don't know. Your body and your whole world is mostly upside down. Middle school is like that carnival ride called the Tilt a Whirl. Everything is going crazy and you don't know which way it will go next. But one thing you begin to know for sure – is that you like girls. You can't really talk about it yet. And some of you mature faster than I did – but I certainly couldn't talk TO a girl yet.

But that world was opening up to me and, suffice it to say, I was not handling it well. Conviction. You see the road you're going down and you KNOW it's not the road you should be going down. And the first step to following Jesus is to turn from that road. In fact, you can't truly take the second step of trusting in Jesus until you take the first step of turning from your sin.

You know you are a child of God if:

2. You have made a clear commitment to Christ

“Even as he spoke, many believed in him.” John 8:30

- **You Trusted in Jesus**

This begins with the most child-like prayer – **“Lord Jesus, save me.”** That’s it. “Lord Jesus, forgive me.” I’m pretty sure I prayed that prayer 100 times when I was young. Pretty much every opportunity. You’re hoping for the secret hand raise and not the stand up and come forward – because the secret hand raise you can do as often as you want. The stand up and come forward means you’re not sure you were really saved before and you actually have to go public with that uncertainty.

Let me reassure you if your story is like mine. ***You don’t need to get saved over and over.***

Feeling that way is actually a lack of faith in Jesus. Saving faith is not about the strength of your faith but about the OBJECT of your faith. Your faith could be as small as a mustard seed. But if your faith is in JESUS, that mustard seed is enough – because it’s not about you – it’s about HIM.

It’s like if you were ***drowning in the ocean*** and **the coast guard diver** dropped in to save you. Would you think for a second that you were saved by the power of your WAVE, when you were calling for help? No! You would give all the credit for your rescue to the Coast Guard for finding you, sending in divers and lifting you out of the churning waters that would have meant your certain death.

Do you remember when you turned from your sin and trusted in Jesus? Even if you can’t remember a single moment in time – like some people who have a date in their Bibles – can you remember a season of your life when everything changed? Because that is what happens when you really surrender to Jesus. He takes over and changes you.

You know you are a child of God if:

2. You have made a clear commitment to Christ

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36

- **You were Transformed by Jesus**

This is what Jesus does – ***He sets people free!*** You were dead in your sin – a slave to your own desires – and He saved you from that! He broke the chains that bound you and brought you into a new reality where sin was not your master – Jesus was your new Master. Suddenly you wanted to read the Bible – no one had to tell you to. Suddenly you wanted to do the right thing – no one had to police your behavior. Suddenly you had a purpose bigger than yourself.

One more sign that you are really a child of God. You know how far from God you used to be; you made a clear commitment to Christ; and third:

You know you are a child of God if:

3. You have a living Relationship with God

“Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” John 8:47

- You Hear and Obey God every day

As I said before, this is not about hearing an audible voice. This is about **recognizing that God has spoken to us through Jesus and the Bible**. It's about hearing God's voice through His Word. I'm not saying you have to read the Bible and find something to obey every day IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. I'm saying that if you ARE saved, you will naturally and increasingly seek to please God.

So please – **don't take this for granted**. Don't assume you're fine. If you don't care what God says, this verse should shake you up. If you have no interest in the Bible you should feel very troubled. We all go through dry patches in terms of how we feel about God and the Bible. But if your dry patch in terms of lack of interest has dragged on for years and years, Jesus may be speaking directly to you today.

If you never hear from God it probably indicates that you have never made a clear and decisive commitment to Christ. I've seen this over and over in ministry.

One older couple had been attending our church in Chicago for 10 years, off and on. They were regulars in Sunday school and had many friends at the church. They went through the membership process, which is how I met them. And in their interviews when we asked them **"what is the gospel,"** they kept saying, "The gospel is the Bible and it tells us how to live." In the middle of the third follow up meeting, this sweet lady looked at her husband and said, "Honey, I think they're telling us that's not the right answer."

Of course, the Bible contains the Gospel and it does tell us how to live. But that is not how to be saved! The Bible tells us that Jesus lived the life we should have lived and only because of Jesus can we be saved. **It's not about how WE live but about how HE lived and died and rose again.** The gospel is all about JESUS – not about us. The part that is about us is about how far we fall short of His glory – how all we deserve from Him is death and judgment.

This sweet couple – halfway through membership – realized they had lived over 70 years and had never really understood the gospel. They thought for years they were fine with God – but they had missed the point, even while attending a good Bible-teaching church for ten years!

One more point as we close.

You know you are a child of God if:

- **You Hear and Obey God every day**

"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" John 8:31-32

- **You Persevere and Experience understanding and freedom**

The mark of true saving faith is not a one time profession. Lots of people hear the good news and respond quickly with joy. The mark of true saving faith is that ***you HOLD TO the teaching of Jesus for the long haul.*** You stick with Jesus, no matter what.

Notice this promise of freedom is not for those who just raise their hand one time or walk an aisle. This promise is only for those who HOLD TO the teachings of Jesus. That wasn't an easy thing for the early disciples and it isn't easy today. There is a cost to following Jesus. He said, "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." Following Jesus is a life of carrying a cross – like He did.

But it is a joyful life of relationship with God. We have the joyful privilege to hear God's voice and obey Him. He invites us into a living relationship and speaks to us – guiding us as we walk with Him. And we don't persevere on our own – the Lord is with us every step of the way.

And as we hold to Him in persevering faith, we will experience a deeper level of both understanding and freedom. We will come to appreciate God's grace and power more. And we will live in greater freedom from sin and the distractions of this world.

"if you hold to my teachings," Jesus says, "THEN you are really my disciples. THEN you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!"

Let's pray.